

T'ovma Artsruni

Thomas Arccruni

DATE OF BIRTH	Unknown
PLACE OF BIRTH	Unknown
DATE OF DEATH	Unknown; after 904 and probably before 908
PLACE OF DEATH	Unknown

BIOGRAPHY

T'ovma is an elusive figure, unattested outside his *History* and a reluctant presence within it. Only once does he refer to himself by name. As this point in the text coincides with the conclusion of one of his principal sources, the *History* of Movsēs Khorenats'i, which also contains a short autobiographical passage in its conclusion, it seems that it was literary precedent that prompted this rare disclosure.

T'ovma does not identify his family background, although he has universally been viewed as a member of the Artsruni house. Nor does he indicate his status or rank; it is only in the 13th century that the Armenian historian Kirakos first defined him as a *vardapet*, a spiritual teacher within the Armenian church. There can be little doubt that he was a cleric. Not only is his work suffused with biblical quotations and allusions, but he also states that he was beside Ashot Artsruni, the eldest son of Grigor Derenik, when he was on his death-bed in autumn 903. T'ovma reports both Ashot's last confession and his dread as death approached – 'Will God forgive the multitude of my trespasses? Tell me, answer me' – suggesting that he attended and observed in a clerical capacity.

T'ovma states that he was asked to compile this family history by Grigor Derenik, lord of the Artsrunik' and prince of Vaspurakan; however he later refers to his patron as Gagik, second son of Grigor Derenik: 'We have presented it to you, most valiant lover of words, Gagik [prince of] Vaspurakan and great commander of Armenia.' Since Grigor Derenik was killed in 887, it follows that T'ovma started work before that date. Although it has been suggested that the solitary reference to Grigor as patron may be a scribal error for Gagik, they are always titled differently in the text and the distinction should be

maintained. In any event, T'ovma must have finished his composition before 908, since the text contains no hint of the coronation of Gagik Artsruni in that year. Rather, the original text concludes on a somber note, with heavy Artsruni losses in battle and the threat of invasion from all sides.

Two further propositions relating to T'ovma's life and career may be advanced. First, although the two sponsors of the work are prominent figures in the text, along with Grigor Derenik's eldest son, Ashot, it is striking that a third member of the Artsruni house, namely Gurgēn son of Apupelch, prince of Andzavats'ik', is given considerable exposure. Gurgēn was a 'noble, glorious and victorious champion' deserving of 'the most abundant praises'. On two occasions, T'ovma acknowledges that he has been using an account of the deeds of Gurgēn. Evidently he had access to records from another branch of the extended Artsruni house; Gurgēn and Grigor Derenik were regularly in conflict with one another and this may account for the less than flattering portrait of Grigor Derenik at several points.

Second, T'ovma refers sparingly to local bishops. He refers to Sahak Vahevuni, bishop of Nakhichevan and Mardpetakan, as the brother of the martyred Apusahak Vahevuni. He describes the return of the blessed bishop of Artsrunik', Yovhannēs, from captivity in Samarra in 862 and the succession of Yovhan to his see. He also reports the death of Grigor, bishop of Rshtunik' in the earthquake that struck the city of Dvin in 892. The see of Rshtunik' was located in the region of Vaspurakan and was one of several dioceses under Artsruni influence. Bishop Grigor does not otherwise feature in the text and the presence of this otherwise isolated notice is surprising. One solution is to argue that T'ovma included it because he succeeded Grigor to this office. If T'ovma was a bishop, this would account for his presence at the death of Ashot, his familiarity with the contested and fluid world of Artsruni politics and his access to records from rival branches of the Artsruni house. This, however, remains speculative.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

- M.H. Darbinyan-Melikyan, *Patmut'iwn Tann Artsruneats'/T'ovma Artsruni ew Ananum*, Yerevan, 2006
- K'. Patkanean, *T'ovmayi vardapeti Artsrunwoy Patmut'iwn tann Artsruneats'*, St Petersburg, 1887 (repr. Tiflis, 1917; repr. Delmar NY, 1991), pp. 98-261

Secondary

- R.W. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni. History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, Detroit, 1985
- R.W. Thomson, 'T'ovmay Arcruni as Historian', in T.J. Samuelian and M.E. Stone (eds.), *Medieval Armenian culture*, Chico CA, 1984, 69-80
- R.W. Thomson, 'T'ovmay Arcruni's debt to Elišē', *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 18 (1984) 227-35
- V. Vardanyan, *T'ovma Artsruni ev Ananum, Patmut'yun Artsrunyats' Tan*, Yerevan, 1978 (repr. 1985)
- M. Mkryan, 'Veratsnut'yan skzbnavorman artats'olumë X dari hay patmut'yan mej', *Banber Erevani Hamalsarani* (1975/1) 89-108
- V. Vardanyan, 'Patmut'yun tann Artsruneats' erkum hishatakvats mi k'ani teghanunneri masin', *Patmabanasirakan Handës* (1973/1) 111-22
- N. Tsovakan [N. Pogharean], 'T'ovma Artsruni: bnagrakan srbagrut'iwnner', *Sion* (1965) 319-20

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Patmut'iwn tann Artsruneats', 'History of the House of Artsrunik'

DATE After 903 and before 908

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Armenian

DESCRIPTION

The work offers an extended study of the history of the Artsruni family from the time of Noah down to 904. Of this, some three-fifths, extending to 162 pages of Patkanean's edition, is relevant to Christian-Muslim relations. After a brief and highly individual biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, according to which he was taught by an Arian monk named Sargis Baḥīrā and influenced by Salmān the Persian, the text then offers a list of caliphs with brief biographical details extending as far as al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-61).

The remaining 154 pages cover the period between 851 and 904. They provide a very detailed study of political and social interaction between Christians and Muslims across the districts of southern Armenia, collectively known as Vaspurakan, which were controlled by the extended noble house of Artsrunik'. Almost two-thirds of this account is focused upon the devastating sequence of campaigns undertaken by Bughā al-Kabīr across Vaspurakan in the years after 851, and their aftermath. During this decade, a significant number of

the Armenian elite were captured and despatched to Samarra. The remainder were driven into exile, apart from a select few who were promoted as pliable clients. Several themes are developed within the narrative. There is a brief refutation of Islam, arguing that it relied on the 'unsupported and uncontrolled' argument of a single person and contrasting this with Muslim legal practice, which respected multiple witnesses.

T'ovma records a sequence of martyrdoms, largely of Armenian nobles (Gēorg Akets'i, Khosrov Gabeghean, Grigor Artsruni, Mukat'l of Vanand) but also of an unnamed Persian Muslim who had converted to Christianity. On the basis of their form and their content, these appear to be based on independent martyrologies. T'ovma also names Armenian nobles who had converted to Islam (including Bagarat Bagratuni, Vasak Artsruni and Ashot Artsruni, father of Grigor Derenik), and implies that those who returned from captivity in Samarra had all been guilty of apostasy. The apostasy of Bagarat Bagratuni prompts T'ovma to consider the subject at length. This digression, whilst decidedly atypical in the *History*, is not a wholly original study but is based upon Eusebius' account of Novatian and the Elkasites in his *Ecclesiastical history*.

The death of Ashot Artsruni provides T'ovma with a second opportunity to offer a more personal reflection: 'I do not mock his remorse and repentance...but it is unclear whether they were effective, for with difficulty are scars cleaned away by the exercise of words. However, in the house of Christ's Father there are many mansions. Perhaps they will remain free from torments...?' Such uncertainty over Ashot's eternal fate reveals T'ovma's anxiety and evident discomfort over the clash of lay and spiritual loyalties.

T'ovma's debt to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical history* supplies a timely reminder that his *History* was both constructed from and influenced by earlier compositions. Some were mined for their information, which was then recapitulated, abbreviated or adapted. Others provided a literary and historical template. As Thomson has shown, many of the passages dealing with Bughā's campaigns are modelled upon Eghishē's [Elišē's] *History of Vardan and the Armenian war* which describes an analogous situation for Armenians in the middle of the 5th century, when they were oppressed by Sasanian Persia. In these passages, T'ovma's graphic portraits of the caliph, al-Mutawakkil, of Bughā, and more generally of Armenian disunity, all depend upon

Eghishē's earlier *History*; they are not the independent, near-contemporary representations that they might appear to be.

As noted above, T'ovma's *History* offers a detailed study of Christian–Muslim relations in a region of competing lordships and political rivalries. Three different tiers of Muslim authority can be discerned: the caliph, the caliph's representative and the local emir. These relationships are repeatedly renegotiated as the various parties advance their influence or suffer losses. By the time T'ovma was writing, it is clear that local emirates were a familiar feature of the political landscape, to be attacked, courted or resisted by Armenian nobles in much the same way as any other rival lordship. These ties could extend to marriage alliances: Muḥammad Afshīn ibn Abī l-Sāj, *ostikan* or governor of Azerbaijan, was married to the daughter of Shapuh Bagratuni, and so a niece of Ashot Bagratuni, prince of princes and king of Armenia after 24 August 884. At the same time, it is possible to discern signs of cultural fusion. T'ovma's *History* is populated with members of the Armenian elite bearing names such as Hasanik ('little Ḥasan'), Apumkdēm, Apuset', Apusakr and Apujap'r.

T'ovma reveals much less about relations outside the elite. He reveals that merchants were responsible for recovering the corpse of Grigor Derenik after his murder at the hands of Aplbers (Abū l-Faris ibn Abī Maṣṣūr), emir of Her. T'ovma does not reveal whether they redeemed his body for a price, or why they did this, or why they were successful. Elsewhere he notes that the widow of Sahak, emir of Tiflis, went round Bughā's camp 'unveiled, which was not customary for the women of the Muslim people'. Such incidental comments on cultural interaction and difference are frustratingly rare.

SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this work lies in its sustained coverage of contested relations across southern Armenia in the second half of the 9th century, when local lordships were split between Christian and Muslim elites. It also resides in its unaltered state; although several continuators appended separate narratives to the end of the text, there is no indication that they reshaped T'ovma's *History*. This is not a work of great political or theological sophistication, but it does offer a unique insight into the politics of power at a local level.

MANUSCRIPTS

The single manuscript of the work is located in the Matenadaran Institute of Manuscripts in Yerevan but is not listed in that institution's published catalogues. It was copied on the island of Aght'amar in Lake Van in 1303.

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

M.H. Darbinyan-Melikyan, *Patmut'iwn Tann Artsruneats'/T'ovma Artsruni ew Ananum*, Yerevan, 2006 (new edition, unseen)

M.O. Darbinian Melikian, *Istoriia Doma Artsruni*, Yerevan, 2001 (Russian trans.)

Patkanean, *T'ovmayi vardapeti Artsrunwoy Patmut'iwn tann Artsruneats'*, pp. 98-261 (old edition)

Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni. History of the House of the Artsrunik'* (English trans. and commentary)

Vardanyan, *T'ovma Artsruni ev Ananum, Patmut'yun Artsrunyats' Tan* (Armenian trans. and commentary)

STUDIES

Thomson, 'T'ovmay Arcruni as Historian'

Thomson, 'T'ovmay Arcruni's debt to Eliše'

Mkryan, 'Veratsnut'yan skzbnavorman artats'olumë X dari hay patmut'yan mej'

Vardanyan, 'Patmut'yun tann Artsruneats' erkum hishatakvats mi k'ani tegha nunneri masin'

Tsovakan [N. Pogharean], 'T'ovma Artsruni: bnagrakan srbagrut'iwnner'

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